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INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

VOLUME XXVI

1950

ROYAL INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
CHATHAM HOUSE, ST JAMES'S SQUARE,
LONDON, S.W.1

[Title page]

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THE PEASANTRY OF SOUTH EAST ASIA [1]

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000 IF it is not wholly true that the social and economic reconstruction which is so necessary in Asia today must begin with the peasant, it is certain that no programme which omits the peasant can be on firm foundations. The recent history of China is evidence enough for this. My concern, as a social anthropologist, is with the analysis and classification of social relations between people and groups of people, rather than with political or economic affairs as such, although inevitably I cannot dis-
128 regard them. So my aim is to show briefly some of the most important
121 aspects of the social organization of the South East Asian peasant communities, and of the values by which this organization works. Though the details in my paper refer mainly to Malaya and Indonesia, I think the generalizations have some value for the South East Asian region as a whole.

If the basic features of the peasant society are ignored, one can understand neither the peculiar tenacity which it still possesses in modern conditions, nor the reactions of its members to the increasing impact of ex-
121 ternal economic and political forces. The definition of a peasant is a
565 countryman—a man engaged in rural pursuits, primarily agriculture, with
463 a comparatively simple technology and a special interest in the land he works. In South East Asia one may extend the application of the term to
241 cover the majority of fishermen and even village craftsmen too. They are
226 of the same social class as the agriculturalists, and often members of the
32 same families. As occupational groups, they may even be separable only in theory, since many a peasant farmer is also a fisherman or craftsman by turns, as his seasonal cycle or his cash-needs influence him. What R. H. Tawney has said of agriculture—that it is at once a craft, a business, and a manner of life—can be applied more widely here; the problems of all these peasants alike are partly technical, partly financial and commercial, and partly cultural and social.

162 It is difficult to say just what proportion of the present population of
565 South East Asia may be classed as peasants. It would seem that in nearly
241 every South East Asian country two-thirds or more of the total population
463 is to be found in agricultural communities, tilling the soil. In 1930 the
32 census of Java and Madura in Indonesia gave about 70 per cent of the male
462 workers as dependent for their livelihood on native agricultural output, and about 75 per cent in the regions of Indonesia outside Java and Madura, while large numbers of women were engaged in home craft production. In Siam, in about 1930, almost 90 per cent of the population lived in agricultural communities, rice production providing the living of about 80 per

[1] Originally delivered at a meeting at Chatham House on 21 February 1950.

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cent of the population. Malaya, of course, is exceptional, because of the especially heavy concentration on the production of rubber and tin. According to the 1947 census of Malaya, about 34 per cent of the working population were classed as cultivators and fishermen working on their own account or as unpaid members of families. In all, I think one could reckon that rather more than 100 million people in South East Asia can be regarded as peasantry.

Throughout all this region, peasant technology is simple; skills, though traditionally well adapted to the job in hand, are of limited range. Soils, despite the richness of some of the swamps and river flood-plains, are generally of poor quality. The system of felling and burning the jungle, taking off crops for a few years, and then moving away to cultivate fresh clearings while the old ones revert to jungle, is still common in the mountain areas of Burma, Malaya, and Siam, in part of West Java, in much of Borneo, and in the outer islands of Indonesia. It is known as shifting cultivation or jungle-fallowing. Although regarded as extremely primitive, it is an economic use of land in areas of low population density, where plentiful land allows of long rotation of clearings and consequent restoration of soil fertility. But where population is dense, the system cannot provide the necessary volume of production without endangering the future soil capital, and that is one of the major problems of the area. In the more sedentary forms of agriculture, fertility is conserved with a great deal of care, by manuring, by water control, and so on. Sometimes there is very elaborate and spectacular terracing, as in parts of the Philippines or in Bali, where the native cultivator through his own efforts through generations has known how to make the best of the land with his available techniques. Yet many of these techniques are only of limited efficiency, and custom may be a barrier to improvement. For large masses of the Muslim peasantry of South East Asia, for instance, the pig, an excellent economic converter of resources, is taboo for religious reasons.

Productivity of the South East Asian peasant is apt to be low, whether considered in terms of the margins required above subsistence to give him and his family the range of goods and services they want, or by comparison with Western results. It is hard to make this last comparison significant because of the differing bases, but the following figures will give, perhaps rather superficially, some idea of the comparison. In terms of cwt. of cropping per acre, for instance, the rice crop of part of South East Asia can be compared roughly with the wheat crop of Western Europe. The figures are taken from different years, but they can be regarded as significant averages. Java at 12 cwt. of rice to the acre corresponds with France at 12 cwt. of wheat to the acre; Siam at 14 cwt. to the acre with the United Kingdom at 18 cwt. and Germany at a little less; Japan at 27 cwt. of rice per acre corresponds to Denmark with 27 cwt. of wheat per acre. Yet rice is supposed to be a crop of much higher yield. What is more significant is that productivity per acre in both Malaya and Indo-China is only 10 cwt. on the average, or only between one-third and one-half of the average in Japan.

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Moreover, in any comparison between South East Asia and the peasantry of Europe, quite apart from differences in the production of crops other than the staple grain, there is an important difference in the average size of the holdings worked. The South East Asian peasant has fewer acres than the peasantry of Europe. In France, a country of peasant agriculture, about 40 per cent of the total number of agricultural holdings in 1931 were less than 2½ acres apiece; the average size of this group of holdings was 1½ acres each. But about 45 per cent of the total holdings were between 2½ and 22½ acres, with an average of about 10 acres each. There are areas in South East Asia where the average size of peasant holdings is fairly large. In Cochin China, while 72 per cent of the landowners have holdings between 2½ and 12 acres, there are provinces where more than half of them have holdings above 12 acres in size. In Siam, too, the average peasant holding seems of tolerable size—4 acres or so in the south and north east, 5½ acres in the north, and 10½ acres in central Siam, where more than one-third of the rural families live. But in Java, in 1938, the average size of holdings was only just over 2 acres for all tax-paying landowners in the country. In the Tonkin delta of Indo-China, another large area of heavy concentration of peasantry, as much as 60 per cent of the peasants have been reckoned to own holdings of less than nine-tenths of an acre, and 90 per cent to have holdings of under 4½ acres apiece. It has been estimated that a peasant family needs for adequate support 2½ to 5 acres of land, cultivating it by 'wet rice' methods. Many sections of the farming population in Java and Indo-China, for instance, are obviously well below this critical level. Even though large-scale irrigation and very intensive land use, including double cropping of rice in the year and much use of secondary crops, may lower the critical figure considerably, the peasant in such conditions is always liable to have to seek work outside his holding or to put up with inadequate living standards, even in nutrition. 311 241 433 565 361

The difficulties of agriculture in such conditions are further increased by the fact that a man's holding is often not a single undivided farm, but a set of dispersed fields, some of very small size. This dispersion and fragmentation of holdings allows for some advantages in adapting crops to soil and water variations, and is some security against wholesale raids by pests, but it makes for technical difficulties in the use of implements and labour on any scale. Since the dispersion is due primarily to traditional customs of inheritance and marriage, efforts to secure consolidation are apt to be only of temporary benefit, though some success has attended administrative action against undue fragmentation.

The same comparatively low level of productivity is seen in fishing, which gives the one great source of animal protein to the South East Asian peasant's diet. Before the war a Malay peasant fisherman produced on the average 1½ tons of fish per head per annum and in 1947 nearly 1 ton per 433 226 565

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433 226 565 annum. Productivity in the British fishing industry was, and probably still is, at least eight times as great per man. In the United States' fishing industry it is much greater still. This immensely greater productivity per man is of course achieved only by a much heavier use of capital equipment. Technological investment, then, is an obvious method of trying to raise peasant production.

434 511 565 Peasant income in this region is thus low by most standards. Adequate information about this is lacking, but there is no reason to doubt the indicative character of what has been collected. For instance, an inquiry in Java in 1926 showed that over 60 per cent of the people had in cash and in kind incomes of less than £12 10s. a year (150 Dutch florins), and 80 per cent had incomes of less than £25 a year (300 florins). In Malaya in 1940 I calculated that the fishermen of the east coast earned on the average about £12 a year. This does not mean much without consideration of the prices of goods on which the income was spent. But any such comparison would soon make it clear that a man with such an income was hard put to it to keep his family in comfort. Cash incomes have risen steeply during and since the war, but so have the prices of consumer goods, and many peasants are probably rather worse off than before, unless they have been able to sell rice or other scarcity goods.

433 565 461 The peasant economy of South East Asia uses abundant labour and has a low level of capital equipment. Even then, owing to lack of efficient organization, one can point to a great amount of unused man-hours. Yet these features must not be over-stressed. It is common to blame the peasant for a *dolce far niente* attitude, and attribute his poverty to his idleness. What J. Johnston Abraham, the author of the well-known travel book, *Surgeon's Log*,[1] wrote forty years ago of the Malay is often quoted in essence still:

> The Malay . . . has the aristocratic contempt for toil . . . [he] is of all things a philosopher. He squats in the warm sun and chews betel contentedly. He sees the obvious foolishness of working in a country too hot for toil, when the earth is so prolific that a fortnight's leisurely labour will produce food for a year, and the water is so plentifully supplied with fish that an hour, in the cool of the evening with a net, will supply luxury for a fortnight.

Anyone who has lived among the Malay peasantry and has seen their back-breaking work of rice-planting, or their long hours at sea in the broiling sun hauling the nets for fish, will know what a parody this is. The working rhythm of the Asiatic peasant is different from that of the European. The economic system is not well enough geared to alternative employment when technical hitches occur in his ordinary occupation. But the peasant is not simply thriftless of his time and his money. He plans with care his ploughing, sowing, weeding, and harvesting; he is assiduous in searching for fodder for his animals, in watering his vegetable garden, in repairing his fishing-boat or his net. If he can scrape together some extra cash above the daily needs of his family, he may spend it on clothes for his child or jewellery

[1] London, Chapman & Hall (14th rev. ed., 1939) pp. 69–70.

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for his wife—but he is equally likely to put it into a piece of equipment or to hire some land. To understand the position of the peasant one must realize the structure of the economic system of which he is a part, and the values of his social system.

The peasant economy must not be thought of as simply a subsistence economy. It has a complex marketing structure which, even apart from Western influences, had an elaborate series of middlemen for making possible the diffusion of cloth, salt, iron, dried fish, spices, and other goods. The system of exchange has been intensified, and the reactions of different types of producers made more sensitive by the influence of the West. On the one side are the Western markets for primary products—coffee, spices, tobacco, copra, kapok, and, above all, rubber—the quick response to which has demonstrated how alive the Asiatic peasant is to making money if the opportunity offers. On the other side are the Western types of consumer goods, novel, attractively presented, easy to use—ranging from lamp oil, imported cigarettes, and cornflour for babies, to electric torches, bicycles, and the cinema. Conservative in his techniques of production, the peasant has shown himself enterprising in his consumption. The result has been that at many points, almost without realizing it, the peasant has become geared to the Western economic system. In the early days of European contact, he had often to be pushed as well as tempted into producing for the Western market. The scathing book, *Max Havelaar*, by the author calling himself 'Multatuli'—later known to be Douwes Dekker—has shown the kind of abuses that resulted from pushing the peasant into an enforced relation to the Western market. But naturally many of these links have been of his own seeking. In the last resort, it is the peasant's own scheme of values, his degree of acceptance of the goods and services which the West offers and which he transmutes to some extent in receiving, which determines his economic destiny.

But for the most part, the peasant has been incapable of perceiving the processes at work. The field is too vast for his comprehension. His reactions to the crisis and depression of the nineteen-thirties were direct and rational as they came under his personal observation. When prices fell he increased production of the export crops to maintain his cash returns; when that failed he retired from the struggle to utilize his backlog of subsistence cropping. But like many a farmer elsewhere, he had not understood much more than the immediate market situation. The pressure of the West has provided the peasant with a new range of wants from which he cannot rid himself even should he wish, and markets for his labour and raw materials which are an inducement to him to modify his habits. A new administrative system has given him fresh legal framework for many of his acts. A new system of taxation, though often lighter than before, is more methodical in its pursuit of defaulters. His land, the foundation of his existence, has for the most part been preserved to him, and indeed the security for his legal title to it has been much improved. But alien planta-

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427 But the alien planta-
565 tions and even alien smallholders have threatened to grasp at it, and the
177 advances of Western medicine, so beneficial in many ways, have only accelerated the rate of increase of the population which has to seek a livelihood from it. In most parts of South East Asia the peasant is the actual owner of the land he tills, often legally under some agreement with
426 the State. But his rights to the produce are often severely limited by a heavy burden of indebtedness. The real effects of this may be less than people sometimes think, because when the debts are spread among neighbours and kinsfolk interest may be waived, repayment is sometimes protracted or ignored, and the debt may be serviced by other than material means. But there is no doubt that the peasant producer is badly hampered by his debt load. It is most pressing when debt is contracted to a member of an alien ethnic group, an Indian or a Chinese, for whom the transaction is a purely commercial one.

563 The role of alien Asiatic ethnic groups is one of the most significant
565 features in the economic and political life of the peasantry of South East
177 Asia today. For many centuries, Indian and Chinese trading influences
178 have met in the South East Asian region, and Indian religious concepts
439 have penetrated deep into many of its social systems. But for more than four hundred years the dominant commercial and political note has tended to be sounded by Europeans. Now the balance is altering. Colonialism may have set the modern structure of South East Asian society, but the patterns will persist when the colonial Powers have withdrawn. To this new society the Chinese above all have the economic key. In Indo-China, Siam, Malaya, the Philippines, and Java, the Chinese have penetrated the economic system and taken over crucial functions. They have shared in much of the wholesale import trade, they have attained pre-eminence in retailing vital imported goods to the peasant, and they act as middlemen for the collection, storage, and processing of peasant export products. As part of this process they often finance the peasant producer by advances on his crop, gaining a double profit by giving part of these advances in goods, not cash. The Chinese achievement has been remarkable. They have been kept on the margin both of the peasant society with which they deal, and of the European society with which at a later stage their growing wealth would allow them to associate. Though lacking any formal political power, which in the Orient as elsewhere is so often the passport to success, they have built up a trading structure of extraordinary toughness, elasticity, and elaboration.

565 The wider political implications of this are not my concern here. But
609 it is important to note three points in connexion with the peasant theme.
186 One is the xenophobic reaction of the local urban dwellers and of peasants
578 too, which has periodically found expression against the Chinese, as traders or residents in South East Asia, in the form of riots and other disturbances.
563 Another is the reaction of the Chinese, whose economic strength has given
241 them confidence, and who are now prepared to stand by their claim to a

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real stake in the countries of the Nan Yang, as settled members of the local society, and not as aliens. The third point is that the Chinese community has never been one of middlemen only; there has always been a fair proportion of cultivators within it. The poor peasantry of South East Asia now includes a Chinese as well as an indigenous element. The 1947 census of Malaya shows 45,000 Chinese engaged in rice growing, and another 100,000 in market gardening and fishing, essentially peasant pursuits.

The pressure to which the South East Asian peasant has been subjected by the combination of Western and other alien influences has been severe. But we must beware lest we misinterpret it. In a recent book which gives a comparative analysis of the agrarian situation in the countries of South East Asia, appears a striking statement about Malaya—that development of mining and rubber industries has pushed the native Malay population more and more towards the east, into the areas of the former Unfederated Malay States: 'The Malays', it is said, 'considered the east as safe from Western penetration, and therefore preferred this undeveloped area to the irrigated lands on the western coast, mainly because there they could get only temporary land licences, since a complete survey of all potential tin-bearing regions had not yet been made'.[1]

It is true that the eastern States are predominantly Malay in population, and that the greater part of the vast immigrant population of Malaya is densely settled on the western side of the peninsula, where the resources are richer and access easier than on the eastern side. It is also true that there has been some lack of enthusiasm among Malay peasants to colonize the new Government-developed irrigation areas, for complex reasons, including lack of capital in the past, and disinclination to move from their ancestral homes. But it is quite incorrect to put these facts together and to argue that the Malay has been pushed by alien pressure over from the west to the east of the peninsula. Apart from some seasonal movement for rice harvesting or fishing, the internal migration of Malays is inconsiderable, despite the rapid development of communications in recent years. Both the 1931 and the 1947 census show that whatever movement takes place—well under 10 per cent—is almost wholly from one State to another, either on the west coast or on the east coast, or to Singapore. Hardly any movement at all occurs from the west to the east. Moreover, the 1947 census shows that between 1931 and 1947 the Malay population of the western States increased by about one-third, at a rate slightly higher than that of the eastern States. The proportion of Malays in these western States, in terms of the total population of all ethnic groups, also increased slightly during this period, due primarily to the decline of Indians and Indonesians. In other words, though foreign economic penetration has immersed the western Malay in a flood of alien elements, it has not driven him away. On the contrary, he has preferred to stay and await events.

[1] Erich H. Jacoby, *Agrarian Unrest in Southeast Asia* (New York, Colombia University Press, 1949) p. 113.

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[438] One reason for this is economic advantage. The coming of rubber, in particular, has given to the Malay peasant of the west coast an income considerably higher, on the whole, than that of the east coast peasant.

[166] The effects of Westernization are profound. But they do not lie in crude physical displacement of the peasant or degradation of his living conditions. They lie in the widening of the gap between his expanding range of wants and his level of productivity, and in his inability to measure and in any way control the economic forces operating in his field. Westernization has meant for the peasant an enlargement of the social horizon—more knowledge, through better communications and education, of other places, of other peoples of kindred and dissimilar interests. It has created new ambitions: for different clothing, for new uses of leisure, for a better status for his children, for a position of power in the political scene. All this has disturbed the traditional patterns of peasant society. These patterns, and the class structure of South East Asian society of which they were a part, were probably never too satisfactory to the peasant. Anxiety and evasion must have often been the response to either too rigid or too elastic a rule—and the peasant seems often to have suffered from the exactions of his superior in the social scale. But the scope of the system was known, if not its precise implications. Nowadays the scope of the system has for the most part passed beyond the peasant's grasp, and much of it has become de-personalized.

To illustrate this by giving a more concrete analysis of some of the values in the peasant's life, let me take the area of Malaya and Indonesia where Islam is the major religion of the people.

In his daily life the Indonesian or Malay peasant is governed largely by the canons of behaviour, the ties of friendship and neighbourliness, the relations of work and social intercourse of his village community. So much is this so that in Java the *desa*, the village, was crystallized by the Dutch into an administrative and developmental unit, and its communal structure strengthened for welfare purposes. But as important as the village, and indeed often basic to its structure, are the family and larger kin organizations. From these a person gets his social status and much of his land and other property, and they have the primary role in his marriage and other crucial events in his progress through life.

Such domestic and local relationships also provide a framework for the peasant in his attempts to come to terms with the forces of nature and human destiny. His world of spirits is a local world. In Indonesia the ancestors do not play the predominant role which they do, for instance, in Annam. But the village, the seashore, the surrounding jungle, wells, trees, and stones are the home of many kinds of spirits, which afflict man with sickness or misfortune, or stand by him as his familiars to guard him. Basic in the religion of the Indonesian peasant is this local, essentially parochial, spirit element. All these values guide his economic and social conduct, and mean a great deal to him.

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But the situation is complex, even in village life. The system of rules governing domestic and local relations—marriage, adoption, inheritance, rights over land, succession to local office, rules of etiquette, and behaviour to superiors—is generally known as the *adat*, the custom. The nature of this custom, and what should be its relation to a more fully developed legal system, have been elaborately studied by the Dutch in Indonesia. At times indeed they have seemed to give the *adat* almost a mystical connotation. Alongside this body of custom, which of course varies from one peasant area to another, is the *shari'a*, the religious rule of Islam. On the one hand this is a unifying force, extra-village and extra-national in character, linking even the remotest mountain farmer spiritually or emotionally with the farmer or townsman of other Muslim communities in South East Asia, and far beyond. On the other hand, the Muslim religious law blends into the field of the *adat*, laying down rules about marriage, inheritance, and other family matters. Then there are the Western rules of law and administrative procedure, laying down just how land is to be acquired, held, and transferred, giving regulations for village management, and imposing penalties for certain kinds of breach of good relations. Yet the Western system offers also inducement to use the law, to protect one's interests firmly, to take advantage of situations where the *adat* has left rights undefined. So three factors—the custom, the Muslim religious rule, and the Western system of law—interact even in the heart of peasant society.

The result is a complex set of forces in dynamic operation, with the peasant being pressed by one or other of them or championing one or other as circumstances arise. In Negri Sembilan, for instance, there has come to be what is almost now a classic case of this interaction. In former times the valuable lands were for the most part those on which 'wet rice' could be cultivated. By the matrilineal system ancestrally operative in that area, these lands were handed down in the female line, from mother to daughter, or from aunt to niece. They were also cultivated largely by women. As rubber came to be developed, however, other lands on the hill-sides, previously of much less value, came to have worth too. For the most part these had to be cleared before being planted in rubber, and this clearing was a task that only men could do properly. Hence men came to have a more direct interest in this land. When questions of inheritance began to arise, divergent views became manifest. Some argued for treating new lands like the old, and handing them down in the female line like the rice lands. Yet there was a strong case for not including these rubber lands in the category of ancestral land, but for letting them be transmitted from a father to his children and through the male line in general. This principle of male inheritance is in line with the emphasis of the Muslim law. This not only gives guidance of the patrilineal kind for distribution of the property of the deceased in cases of dispute, but in all its provisions tends to stress the status of the male against that of the female.

Within the peasant society itself the potential clash of the two systems,

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181 local custom and religious rule, had been present for centuries. But there
177 was little in the economic situation to sharpen it, and the Muslim leaders
565 themselves were often so steeped in the local ways that they allowed as the
602 religious law what was, in fact, the local custom. With the growth of
776 Western processes, the perception of new economic advantages tended to
779 change the equilibrium of the two principles. The advance of education
671 and heightened consciousness of Islam as a world faith also tended to make
182 the religious leaders themselves much more keenly aware of any divergence. Wealthy men who want to leave property to their sons, men with a strong religious sense, men who regard themselves as progressive, or who are in revolt against their clan leaders, therefore tend to be protagonists of the Muslim law. The conservatives, those who see in the custom a defence for women, those who see in it a symbol of an essentially Malay way of life, argue for the retention of the custom. Contact with the West, they say, is changing the structure of the peasant society enough already. The issue has also entered the modern political scene, since the search for factors to increase Malay integration tends to stress the national and extra-national character of Islam at the expense of the more local qualities of the *adat*. Here too it is growing Westernization which has sharpened the issue.

184 In a general discussion such as this, one may be allowed to refer to the
565 peasantry of South East Asia as a body. But they are not uniform in ethnic composition, in national interests, in language, in religion, or in general culture. Moreover, within any local community, there are competing, even conflicting, interests and opinions. The peasant may be unable to face up to the general issues which affect his life so deeply, but in so far as he understands his own interests he is very alive to them and capable of exercising keen judgement in them. It is the small scale of his organization for the most part which renders him so vulnerable.

000 What is likely to be the future of South East Asia from the peasant angle? Prediction is not worth much, since so many elements in the situation are imperfectly known, but there are a few which seem to be significant.

565 The peasant has no native middle class, of the same society as himself,
185 to give a lead to his development and stability in any wider economic
656 organizations that may be set up for his benefit. To improve his economic lot, and in particular to give him a larger fraction of his product through control of marketing, co-operative societies have often been proposed and sometimes tried. Their success has been only limited, partly because the peasant has not been fully persuaded of their attractions as against what the alien middleman can offer, and partly because of the difficulty of securing adequate technical supervision and administration at a sufficiently low official level. Much is now apt to be made of the colonial or semi-colonial status of the South East Asian peasant as a drag upon his development. There is no doubt that colonialism, as a specific form of political control of under-developed territories by a metropolitan Power, is

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nearing the end of its historical phase. How far it is likely to be replaced by a more insidious form of satellitism is not relevant here. But to talk about political emancipation of South East Asia being the prime requirement for the solution of the problems of the peasantry must not obscure the economic factors involved. Nor is fresh capital all that is needed. For the economy of the peasant to attain a relative stability a great development of technical and administrative skills in the commercial field is necessary. The building of a native professional class would seem to be an important element in the construction of a more integrated economic and political system. To concentrate attention on the political factors alone is to overlook the fact that most of the sinews of the economic organism are now provided by the one group which does not have overt political power—the Chinese.

What remains of the traditional class structure in South East Asian society is not of much avail as a defence of the peasant from alien exploitation. In any case, though the rulers and traditional nobility still command much respect, and provide symbols for the unity of the people, there are stirrings of resentment among the people against the perpetuation of a system in which these aristocrats do not perform recognizable services at commensurate incomes. But such resentment does not mean that the peasantry are dry tinder for the spark of Communism to set alight. Communism as yet does not seem to have any great attraction for the mass of the local peasantry of the South East Asian region. The lack of popular response to the Malayan insurrection has shown this. It is presumably true to say that the interest of the peasant can always be secured in any movement which promises to give him greater control of the land—more land more secure tenure, freedom from land debt, and better returns for his produce. But to most of the Indonesian peasants these aims are likely to be sought in nationalism, which can be largely given both an ethnic base and the religious sanctions of Islam. The person to whom the cry for a solution of the land problem is likely to make a most definite appeal, especially in Malaya, is not the Indonesian but the Chinese peasant, who sees himself as excluded from full participation in the land rights of the country folk. Over and over again one hears the cry, ill-founded as it is, that the Chinese have not been allowed to grow rice in Malaya.

Here may well come one of the acute pressure points in the South East Asian scene. The analysis might go as follows. Nationalism is a powerful political force because of its appeal to the individual in a projected, enlarged form of his desires and strivings. But by itself it is an aggressive rather than a constructive force. It lacks a coherent theory for the use of the resources at its control. An ideology containing such theory, and an equally ardent emotional charge on the part of many of its adherents, is provided by Communism. If Communism can work through nationalism it has a most powerful combination. Yet Communism in South East Asia lacks organization of any scale. The optimum conditions for its success are

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Chinese

provided by the Chinese. The Chinese in South East Asia have a highly developed political and economic organization, they are politically underprivileged still, and some sections of them can lay claim to a redress of industrial workers' and agricultural grievances. Moreover, their nationalism is such that large sections of them would seem to be willing to accept any Government in China as their Government. It seems likely then that the advance of Communism in South East Asia may be attempted not through the mass of local peasants directly—or not perhaps primarily through the industrial and rural proletariat of all ethnic groups—but through the Chinese as a national group. There are certain difficulties here. The Chinese are not of uniform social composition. In particular there is cleavage of interest, possibly a growing one, between the Chinese families of long residence in South East Asia and those of more recent arrival. The former, known commonly as the Straits Chinese in Malaya, have somewhat vague but real allegiance to the country of their adoption, which would militate against an uncritical acceptance of mainland Chinese political patterns. Again, it is one thing to use allegiance to a metropolitan Power as a spearhead for one's own political advancement; it is another to adopt the metropolitan ideology when it implies the destruction of one's own class position—and no thesis of 'good' or 'national' or other ethical capitalism could surely quieten entirely the misgivings of a wealthy Singapore or Bangkok Chinese. Then again there are quite a number of Indonesian Communists. But assuming that attempts to seize power fairly rapidly fail, infiltration through Chinese nationalism is plausible, in the guise of claims for peasant reform.

Were a Communist control to be established over the South East Asian peasant, this in itself would be no final solution of his difficulties. If the organization through which it came were Chinese it might be doubted if there would be any real loosening of the restrictions under which peasant production operates. But even if all inequalities in distribution were severely rectified, by cancellation of rural indebtedness, expropriation of landlords, levelling down of richer peasants by sharing of their capital, and substitution of a co-operative marketing system, this could only give some temporary raising of general peasant standards. The basic problem is not simply unequal distribution, but poverty, and a value system not well adapted to the requirements of modern technological change. Any measures of real improvement that can be adopted must be slow, and Communism is an advancing ideology. But for some of the reasons I have indicated its progress in South East Asia may be slower than is sometimes thought. It has been said that the clock in South East Asia now stands at five minutes to twelve. The real trouble may be not this urgency, but that we still do not know how to tell the time!

July 1950